

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-22 (canceled).

Claim 23 (new): A collaborative database system comprising:

 a computer system;

 a storage device, operably coupled to the computer system, on which is maintained a collaborative database for recording data and related metadata providing details about the data and contributors of the data, the data including user-defined database structures including records and fields;

 at least one process executing on the computer system for collective management of the database by a plurality of users, the at least one process enabling users to modify database structures defined by other users and modify content of data records and fields contributed by other users, wherein the metadata enables users to assess the reliability of the data and the contributors of the data.

Claim 24 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the at least one process permits database users to create new data fields for all records in the database.

Claim 25 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the at least one process permits database users to delete existing data fields for all records of the database.

Claim 26 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the at least one process includes privilege mechanisms, notification mechanisms, and

history mechanisms allowing for orderly changes to database structures and content without a central administrator.

Claim 27 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 26, wherein the reliability of the data is assessed by evaluating the reliability of its contributors and the reliability of the contributors is assessed by evaluating the reliability of the data.

Claim 28 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the at least one process provides automated versioning for tracking and maintaining a history of each datum recorded in the database.

Claim 29 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the at least one process provides automated notification to interested database users regarding changes to database structure or contents.

Claim 30 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the at least one process automatically obtains information from various sources and automatically integrates the information into the database.

Claim 31 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the at least one process provides automated reliability assessment for assessing the reliability of the data and the database contributors.

Claim 32 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the at least one process provides automated help for resolving user questions.

Claim 33 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the at least one process provides automated and customizable data retrieval based on criteria provided by the users.

Claim 34 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 28, wherein the data tracked for a contributor's contributions or deletions comprises at least one of:

- user identification information;
- user personal information;
- user performance information;
- information characterization information;
- contributor information;
- source (citation) information;
- feedback information;
- implicit information;
- historical information;
- user rankings obtained from one or more ranking authorities;
- opinion information from contributors and users of the data regarding the reliability of the data and the users; and
- solicited information regarding the reliability of the data and the users.

Claim 35 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the computer system is operably coupled to a communication network, and wherein the at least one process provides a web interface through which the users interact with the database.

Claim 36 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the at least one process uses an editable data markup language for creating and using the database, wherein the editable data markup language comprises:

- means for defining database structures;
- means for editing database structures;
- means for contributing information to database records and fields thereof;
- means for retrieving information from database;
- means for combining data from multiple databases; and
- means for automatically updating one database's contents from another database.

Claim 37 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 28, wherein the history includes the original data and metadata identifying details about the modified data and its contributor.

Claim 38 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the at least one process permits database users to create a new database or database table.

Claim 39 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the at least one process automatically stores metadata in the database including information regarding contributors of data and the data itself, such information provided explicitly by the contributor or obtained implicitly by the at least one process.

Claim 40 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the at least one process provides a ranking authority for generating user rankings based upon user contributions to the database.

Claim 41 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 40, wherein the ranking authority evaluates the reliability of the contributors based upon metadata relating to the contributors' contributions to the database according to criteria provided by a user.

Claim 42 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the at least one process automatically solicits feedback and missing information from the users.

Claim 43 (new): A collaborative database system according to claim 23, wherein the at least one process automatically identifies and eliminates duplicate or redundant information.